

Religion and Science

(HAZRAT KHALIFATUL MASHIH II.)

The conflict between science and religion is very old. It seems to know no beginning. It has been going on from times immemorial. During the various stages of man's intellectual development it has taken different forms. The great scientists were subjected to all manner of persecution. They were held up to scorn, scoffed and jeered at. They were denounced and condemned as magicians and sorcerers. Some of them were even burnt alive. They were made to suffer every hardship and privation known to man at the hands of the votaries of religion and the so-called great champions of its cause. But they and their prototypes, the philosophers, in their turn regarded and stigmatised the founders of religions as the victims of apoplexy, hysteria and melancholia. Those who have cared to read the history of this conflict between

science and religion know that religious men have persecuted the scientists and the philosophers and the latter have given them very obnoxious names. But the question is—what is this conflict and what is it due to? Do really any valid and substantial reasons exist for such a conflict? Does religious teaching counteract or contravene scientific knowledge? The easiest and the best way to know whether or not religion really conflicts with science is to find out their definitions. Disagreement between two persons having the same point of view is due sometimes to the difference in the definitions and interpretations they put upon it. Sometimes a mere difference of definition and the phraseology that is used to explain the same view-point leads to serious disagreement, even active antagonism and hostility. Let us, therefore, first see what is the definition of science and religion.

DEFINITION OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Mazhab (religion) means the way by which to know God and find Him and of which He Himself has informed man by revelation; and by science is meant that organised body of knowledge which has been accumulated on a subject according to fixed principles and is dependent on deductions from self-evident truths, or it means those branches of knowledge which deal with material phenomena and are based mainly on observation, experiment and induction. Could there be possibly any conflict between these two definitions of religion and science? If these are in fact the definitions, respectively, of religion and science, then there is no conflict between them. If the definition of religion is not that which is given, it is bound to come in conflict with science. If it be said that by religion is meant that stage of the mental development of man arriving at which by sheer force of that development and evolution he may come to know of some things which persons with less developed minds than his could not find out, that is to say, if religion is the result and outcome of the development of the subconscious mind, in other words, if by it are meant those sciences which are the result of man's own thinking and deliberation, then the sphere or province of both science and religion is the same. If religion be understood to mean those ideas which spring from and are born of, feelings and sentiments and are not based on any principle, then it is entirely the product of the exercise of man's deliberate faculty and no religion at all. Such ideas can, at best, be called wise and beautiful sayings which deserve no serious discussion. If religion, it should clearly be understood, is the name of those thoughts and ideas which are the result of the development of the subconscious mind, then that is science itself. That which is not based on sound and verified knowledge and is only the creation of the mind is a figment of imagination and unfounded unreality and not what we call by the great name of religion.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Religion really is the name of those verities which concern man's union with his Creator whose knowledge God has bestowed upon him by means of revelation, and science is the name of the combination of those results and conclusions which man arrives at after a deep study of the creation of the universe and the laws that regulate it. Some religious truths, no doubt, are capable of being known by the exercise of man's intellect and mental faculties, but science is wholly and entirely the outcome of an intelligent reflection over what is happening around man in the universe.

In view of these definitions of science and religion there remains absolutely no ground for any dispute or conflict between the two. Religion is based on God's own revealed word and science is His handiwork, and there can possibly be no disagreement between the word and work of an intelligent person. It could be possible with a lunatic or an impostor—but God is neither a lunatic nor an impostor. As He is neither weak of intellect nor deficient in morals, conflict between what He does and what He says is evidently impossible. Hence conflict between science and religion is also impossible.

There may arise a question here—whether God really *is* and speaks to His servants. But we cannot afford to deal here with the question of God's existence. Supposing that He does exist and that He sends down revelations, then there can be no dispute between religion and science. Either deny the existence of religion itself or you shall have to admit that God *is*. You cannot believe in one and disbelieve the other.

REASONS OF THE CONFLICT

If no conflict is possible between science and religion, then why during the ages have they stood arrayed against each other? Why were the scientists condemned, persecuted, put to death and burnt alive? There must be some reasons for this age-long disagreement. The fact is that this dispute, this disagreement, this conflict is unreal, unintelligent, foolish. True religion does not, simply cannot, conflict with science, and true science cannot contradict and confute religion. Religion, as is explained above, is based on God's revealed word, and science is His own work; and there can be no real and true contradiction between the two. If there appears to be one somewhere it shall have to be admitted that either a wrong interpretation was put on the definition of religion by the religious people, or that the definition of science was misunderstood and misconstrued. They both are from a Being who is incapable of erring. It is we who err by misunderstanding true science and true religion and are deceived into believing that they contradict each other.

Water, for instance, was at first believed by scientists to be a

simple element, but now it is *proved* to be a compound substance. Which of the two groups of scientists would you call foolish—those who first thought that water was simple in its composition, or those who believe it to be compound? Suppose that the Quran had then said that water was a compound substance, would not it then be said by the scientists that it conflicted with science, though they were manifestly mistaken in what they considered to be an established scientific truth? Similarly, the Quran does not consider the age of the universe to be 7,000 years. Some religious people have misunderstood it to be a Quranic belief. Science very forcibly contradicts this view. Now it cannot with reason and propriety be said that science contradicts the Quran. It only contradicts a view which is apparently mistaken to be the view of the Quran. The Quran as forcibly controverts this view as does science. Mohy-ud-Din Ibn-ul-Arabi has written in his renowned book, *Fotooh-ul-Ghaib*, that he was told in a revelation that pyramids in Egypt dated hundreds of thousands of years back.

The fact is that we sometimes fail to correctly understand the work or the word of God which leads us to see a conflict between Science and Religion. Otherwise if Religion is actually based on the revealed word of God and Science is his own handiwork, then no conflict between the two is possible, nor even imaginable. Science should then support Religion, not contradict it, because what an intelligent person says always supports what he does. Hence no scientific discovery can conflict with the established religious truths. There can be no contradiction between two truths. The Quran says: "There is no untruth in the Word of God; however deeply you may reflect over its teachings you will find it full of unmixed truth and nothing but truth." Again it says: "There is no error, no flaw in God's work either." That is to say, you will never detect any disagreement, any difference, between the word of God, which is Religion, and the work of God, which is Science.

SCIENCE AND THE QURAN

The Quran repeatedly draws our attention to the investigation and understanding of scientific truths instead of declaiming against them and finding fault with them. The Quran does not discourage the study of Science, but positively encourages it because it is convinced that the increase in knowledge and learning, intellectual development and mental refinement of people, instead of decreasing their respect and reverence for it, would actually raise it in their estimation. It encourages the study of science by saying, "Think and reflect over what is in heavens and earth." By "heavens" are meant those branches of knowledge which relate to the creation and movements of celestial bodies, and by "earth" are meant those sciences which deal with the changes and developments that take place in the terrestrial bodies, such as biology, geology, archaeology, etc. If the study of these sciences were con-

sidered by the Quran to be resulting into a dislike for Religion and all that it stands for, the Quran would have placed a ban upon it. It, on the contrary, enjoins upon and commands its followers to study all these sciences and to think deeply over and make a complete investigation of what new scientific discoveries are made because it is satisfied that no scientific investigation, no new discovery can, in the least, adversely affect its impregnable position, but would only corroborate and support the truth and reality of its teaching. The Quran has not remained satisfied with only making a passing suggestion to its adherents to study scientific knowledge, but has returned to this subject again and again in its pages. It abounds in verses enjoining upon the Muslims to think over the nature, reality and significance of all those numerous things which God has created. One of such verses is: "Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alteration of the night and the day there are signs for men of understanding. Those who remember God standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of heavens and the earth: Our Lord! Thou hast not created this in vain! Glory be to Thee! Save us from the chastisement of the fire." (3: 189, 190.) What clear and definite directions are embodied in these verses for the study of science. How could we know the properties of the things around us and the great benefits that we can draw from an intelligent understanding of these properties and how could we know this great and most useful truth that nothing in the universe is created useless, if we did not make a thorough study and full investigation about them. So the Quran, by drawing our attention to the properties of things, has opened for us avenues of unlimited scientific knowledge. It has also urged upon us the necessity and usefulness of protracted and patient research in our studies by declaring that everything in the universe has its use; nothing is created in vain and has warned us against hasty inferences and jumping at rash conclusions. The scientists of the old school regarded certain parts of the body as useless, and believed that they served no other purpose but to remind us of the stages of physical evolution through which man has passed. They even considered them to be actually prejudicial to human health and recommended their removal, regarding them as responsible for certain diseases. But the advance and development of scientific knowledge and man's varied experience and increased learning have established the unreality and baselessness of this idea and have unmistakably demonstrated the truth and soundness of the Quranic hypothesis. There is an intestine in the human body which the doctors call vermiform appendix. It was generally thought that small pieces of half digested food remained stuck in it, causing appendicitis. Believing this intestine to be apparently of no use, the doctors have till very recently been removing it when perform-

ing an operation for appendicitis. But the recent researches in surgery have shown this idea to be possessing no foundation. Experiments have established its groundlessness. The most recent experiment in this connection was made on twelve monkeys. Appendices of six of them were removed and all of them were put on the same diet. An examination of their general physical health showed that those six monkeys whose appendices were removed had lost their agility and quickness of movement. The effect of this and other experiments of the same nature has been that the doctors who used to cut off the vermiform appendix without any hesitation, even when the patient was not suffering from a serious disease, have become more careful. They have realized that this intestine is not altogether useless, as they first generally believed it to be. Experiments and researches have shown that nothing is useless. If these experiments had not been made and the vermiform appendix would have continued to be regarded as a useless relic of the physical changes through which man has passed in his evolution, how could the truth of the Islamic principle that all things have their uses have been proved? Islam, indeed, encourages the study of Science because, being based on the Revealed Word of God, scientific discoveries reveal the resplendent beauty and unchallengable truth of the teaching of the Quran.

One very common cause of the conflict between Science and Religion is that some people come to look upon their own capricious whims and fads and their ideas based upon imperfect and unsound knowledge as Religion, which necessarily collide with accepted and established scientific facts. Experiments and observations can never agree with fads and fancies, neither are these fads and fancies Religion. The men of science sometimes are as unreasonable and illogical in their attitude as some so-called religious men are. Like the latter, they, too, sometimes are tempted to regard their pet theories as Science. They naturally conflict with religious truths. But theories unproved and unsupported by regular and reliable experiments are not Science, as ideas and views uncorroborated by reason and intelligence of some so-called religious leaders are not Religion. A mere invention of the brain of a man can carry no weight before the Revealed Word of God, as the foolish fancies of a *mullah* are trash before the established and proved historical facts. Theories continue to change. The advance of knowledge and learning has given rise to new theories which have falsified the old ones. Einstein's Theory of Relativity has shown some generally accepted theories to be foundationless. Scientists are as capable of making mistakes as religious men are. All theories are not Science, as all that is said or believed by those who are regarded as religious men is not Religion. We should base all true knowledge on experiment and the Word of God. Then there will be no conflict. If there appears conflict anywhere between Science

and Religion, then either a wrong interpretation has been put on religious teaching and the Word of God has been misunderstood and misconstrued, or there has remained some error, some flaw in making scientific experiment.

(Sunrise.)